Pedagogies of Inclusion: A Critical Exploration of Small-Group Teaching Practice in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical examination of inclusion as a pedagogic principle through a practice-based interrogation of contemporary 'good practice' strategies for encouraging inclusion in small-group teaching. It reflects on our experiences of delivering four classroom exercises that are frequently proposed as strategies for increasing inclusion, and borrows insight from critical intersectional feminist pedagogy to interrogate normative discourses of inclusion in HE. We argue that both the *terms* of inclusion, and the assumption that (verbal) participation is itself a measure of improving inclusion in classroom spaces, require interrogation. This article thus responds to the proliferation of inclusion discourses in contemporary UK HE, by identifying some of the potential pitfalls of measuring inclusion through the limited scope of participation.

Keywords: feminist pedagogy, inclusion, participation, small-group teaching

Introduction

In recent years, 'inclusion' has emerged as a normative pedagogic principle in UK Higher Education (HE).[2] Particularly in the critical social sciences, where questions of social justice structure the field, the quest for more inclusive education is widely considered a self-evident good. Along with initiatives to 'transnationalise' or decolonise the curriculum, and ongoing efforts to widen participation at 'elite' universities, the educational 'grey literatures'[3] reflect a belief that teaching practices can themselves be instrumental in fostering more inclusive universities. It is this way of thinking through inclusion – as a political commitment that can be 'practiced' by teachers in the seminar-space – that is the focus of our research.

In this article, we draw on our experiences of team-teaching a 15-week masters-level gender theory course to offer a practice-based interrogation into the normative value of inclusion.[4] Centrally, we present reflections on four classroom activities that form part of our 'teaching toolbox' (exercises we routinely incorporate in our teaching practice), and which are also frequently associated with increased classroom inclusion. Whilst we found that each of these activities presented a distinctive opportunity to disrupt the status quo of the seminar-space in ways that reflected our political investments in intersectional feminist pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989; hooks 1994), the extent to which the exercises were *necessarily* and *universally* inclusive was less clear.

Along with evaluating the ways in which these particular activities foster inclusion, this article also contributes to conceptual clarification of 'inclusion' itself. Despite the frequency of references to inclusion within UK HE, and the proliferation of practice-based guidance on inclusive teaching, surprisingly little attention has been afforded to what inclusion actually *means* in the small-group teaching setting and, relatedly, how we might go about *measuring* inclusion. One impact of this lack of conceptual clarity is that inclusion risks being emptied of meaning, emerging as a buzzword that – as has been critiqued of the associated emphasis on 'diversity' in HE discourses (Ahmed 2012) – paradoxically 'stands in place' of transformative approaches to

[2] Although carried out in the specific context of UK Higher Education, the increasing transnationalisation of HE – notably in terms of student profiles, educational ideologies, and pedagogic materials – means that our research has relevance to HE contexts beyond the UK.

[3] 'Grey literature' refers to non-commercial or unpublished material – for HE pedagogies this is predominantly in the form of blogs, VLOGS, online resource-sheets, and university guidance documents.

[4] This module is taught through weekly lectures, delivered by permanent members of faculty, and seminars, typically delivered by Graduate Teaching Assistants and Fellows. Seminars have approximately 15 students and are designed to be highly interactive: it is this emphasis on student-led learning that leads us to use the term 'seminar-space' rather than classroom, although there are clear overlaps between the two.

inclusion. The lack of conceptual clarity, moreover, risks entrenching a slippage that is noticeable in the grey literature: between inclusion as a teaching objective, and participation as *the* sign of inclusion. Moreover, as Mariskind points out, 'what "participation" refers to is often taken for granted and rarely critiqued' (2013, 596). These slippages are likely, we suggest, to produce particular contradictions amongst some neurodiverse and disabled students, students for whom English is not a first-language, and those who are less familiar with the Socratic Method.[5] To counter the risk of further excluding students for whom inclusion and participation are not co-dependent, this article also aims to problematise the circulation of *inclusion as participation*.

To meet our dual objectives of conceptual clarification and experience-based interrogation, we proceed with a review of both literatures on 'good practice' approaches to inclusion in the HE seminar-space and intersectional feminist pedagogy. We then provide an in-depth account of our experiences in the seminar-space, evaluating the ways in which our teaching practices were able to contribute towards inclusion. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the need to complicate understandings of inclusion in HE, suggesting that intersectional feminist pedagogy points to a more constrained, yet also more transformative, approach to inclusion.

Literature Review

Good Practice Approaches to Inclusion

With the recent prominence of universal design for learning (UDL), as well as a broader recognition of the varied needs of students accessing HE, inclusion has become a normative pedagogical principle. Across the academic and grey literatures on 'good practices' for fostering inclusion in the HE seminar-space, several approaches recur. Amongst these, group agreements or ground rules are cited as improving student learning by generating a more respectful, and therefore more inclusive, seminar-space (Brookfield and Preskill 1999; https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/08/24/inventory-of-inclusive-teaching-strategies/). Establishing a group agreement involves introducing and discussing – or co-generating with students – a set of rules and conditions for a safe and inclusive learning environment at the beginning of a module. Such agreements are understood to contribute to creating a safe learning environment by holding students accountable

[5] These latter two groups of students are particularly visible at LSE, where 'over 100 languages [are] spoken on campus' and more than 50% of students come from 'Overseas' (http://www.lse.ac.uk/About-LSE/LSE-at-a-glance).

for their behaviour. Further, they can help foster a sense of community and belonging 'by balancing the learning needs of the individual with the learning needs of the group' (https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/building-inclusive-classrooms/establishing-ground-rules).

The use of anonymity, particularly in combination with web-based learning technologies and tools, also appears regularly as a means to enhance inclusion. In their early study of the use of anonymity in online learning, Chester and Gwynne (1998) argue that the elimination of the possibility for identification can enhance a sense of collaboration in learning. Similarly, in their study on the effectiveness of the use of pseudonyms, Miyazoe and Anderson (2011) argue that anonymity may reduce students' anxiety and promote increased engagement with classroom activities. Additionally, anonymity can promote wider participation 'by masking various social barriers such as age, gender, social status, and language proficiencies' (*Ibid.*, 176; cf. Chester and Gwynne 1998).

Teaching activities that aim to increase student participation are also frequently cited as examples of good practice, framed as part of a broader strategy of fostering an inclusive and democratic classroom (Brookfield and Preskill 1999). For Matheson and Sutcliffe 'active student engagement' is important because it signals an expectation that 'student opinions, cultural heritage, and individual backgrounds' are valued (2016, 20). More specifically, activities that require participation from *all* students in a group setting tend to be seen as inherently more inclusive than activities that rely on students taking part proactively. Examples of such activities include randomly calling upon individual students (http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/assessing-and-addressing-our-biases), as well as more elaborate methods, such as handing out tokens to even out student contributions or circle discussions where each student speaks in turn for a specific amount of time. These types of activities explicitly aim to 'even out' rates of participation without relying on the teacher to call upon particular students, thus preempting the risk that students feel unfairly singled out, and minimising the impact of teacher bias (http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/assessing-and-addressing-our-biases).

Overall, good practice literatures on inclusion in HE classrooms tend to favour approaches that assume a link not only between increased participation and increased inclusion (Mariskind 2013), but also between increased inclusion(-as-participation) and increased learning. The approaches briefly reviewed above – group agreements, anonymity and web-based activities, and

activities that encourage or require participation from all students – exemplify this perspective, in that they all aim to foster participation, as well as, to varying degrees, a sense of identification with the seminar-space.

Complicating Hegemonic Understandings of Inclusion: Intersectional Feminist Pedagogy

Our interest in contemporary inclusion discourses developed from the interdisciplinary gender studies environment in which we teach, where questions of power dynamics, participation, and collaborative knowledge building are considered crucial and ongoing (hooks 1994; Parry 1996; Romney et al. 1992). Whilst we believe that feminist pedagogy provides us with ways of working through the ambivalence of mainstreaming inclusion in HE, we are also conscious that the amenability of some feminist pedagogies *to* contemporary neoliberal accounts of inclusion develops from the persistent normative expectations and inequalities that exist within, and beyond, pedagogical practice in HE.

Critiques of generalised renderings of inclusion have been developed within feminist of colour and decolonial pedagogical approaches, which have questioned the 'flattening' of structural and intersecting inequalities within generic, privatised notions of inclusion and diversity (Mohanty 2013, 973; cf. Gibson 2015). From these perspectives, a failure to examine the multidirectional, interpersonal, and structural experiences of power that are felt (and formed within) institutional settings occurs alongside the absorption of these critiques *into* a language of inclusion or diversity in HE (Ali 2009; Gibson 2015; Mirza and Gunaratnam 2014). As Ahmed (2007) writes in her exploration of 'diversity work' in HE, diversity (like inclusion) often acts as an institutional goal that obscures the sustained racism of institutional spaces for which it is ostensibly engaged as a repair. Similarly, in the words of Smele et al., 'diversity management both neutralizes and seeks to profit from what are portrayed as harmless "differences" between groups of people' (2017, 690). These critical engagements with the ways in which universalised and individualised diversity discourses can contribute to the reproduction of sexism, classism, racism, and ableism in classroom spaces have clear parallels in the emergence of 'inclusion' as a pedagogic norm. This indicates the importance of resisting the appeal of symbolic and rhetorical evocations of inclusion in HE, and of working to complicate the 'indicators' of inclusion that frequently circulate as the rationale for pedagogical practices.

Specifically, this paper borrows from these perspectives to question the contemporary tendency to measure inclusion through the singular act of *participation*, which we argue limits our pedagogical considerations to encouraging students to speak. Mayuzumi et al. (2007) explore questions of participation in their interviews with female Japanese students in the Canadian postgraduate setting, and argue that 'dynamic' accounts of diversity would attend to classrooms as a relational experience between the self and other, in which expressions of participation are read through gendered and racialised frames. Their discussion raises the important distinction between speaking and being heard, and the frames of 'otherness' through which participation is received and silenced. As Ellsworth writes in her exploration of anti-racism and teaching 'critical pedagogy', the expectation that elevating 'student voice' contributes to an inclusive space ignores how the voices of marginalised students, often already abstracted from norms of participation, are 'constructed in opposition to the teacher/institution when they try to change the power imbalances they inhabit in their daily lives, including their lives in schools' (1989, 310).

Following Ahmed (2007), Ali's (2009) and Puwar's (2004) attention to the experiences of women of colour within institutional spaces with entrenched racialised and gendered normativities, we question the assumption that *presence* indicates improving diversity. When we consider both the multiplicity of exclusions likely taking place in the seminar-space, and that claims to democratised participation might themselves produce forms of exclusion, it is clear that participation alone cannot act as the indicator of inclusion. Silent *listening*, resistance *towards* class discussions, and refusals *to* engage with gendered, racialised, and classed expectations within the seminar-space also appear as actions that might radically challenge understandings of participation as they are currently framed in good practice models (Harlap 2014; Mariskind 2013). This suggests that a relational, temporal, and multi-directional understanding of classroom dynamics is essential; in other words, what may perform an inclusive learning function in one class, may contribute to an exclusionary dynamic in another. Without attention to such relational dynamics of power, measures of inclusion act as 'problematic aspirations' (Burke 2015, 397). Not only will universal frameworks for inclusion struggle to address students' *different*, and *simultaneously occurring*, forms of exclusion within learning spaces, but universalised *measures* for inclusion – such as participation – might also perpetuate these exclusionary dynamics.

Methodology

This research comprised participant observations and teacher-researcher reflections recorded throughout the duration of a 15-week interdisciplinary core module.[6] Throughout the course, we kept research journals, adding entries after each class or relevant student encounter to scrutinise how our teaching practices might have enhanced 'inclusion', and to track the complications that arose in turning the theory into praxis. The 'ethnographic attitude' that guided our methodological choices was intended to allow us to respond to the tensions highlighted by (and between) an intersectional feminist pedagogical approach, and good practice approaches to inclusion.

Posing problems for the idea of generalisable 'good practice' approaches to inclusion from the outset, our students have a cohort-identity that both is distinctive in being highly international, multilingual, predominantly women-identified, and economically elite, and belies the diversity within the group, which includes students who do not meet any of these positionings. Almost all of the approximate total of 60 students were studying MSc programmes at the LSE's Department of Gender Studies, but came from different national, academic, and professional backgrounds. This paper collates and abstracts our observations, to preserve student anonymity and produce insights that are most useful to fellow teachers,

The Praxis of Inclusive Seminar Teaching

This section describes and critically evaluates four exercises from our 'teaching toolbox' that also appear in the good practice literature reviewed above. We examine group agreements, a collaborative *Google Doc* resource, a *Padlet* activity, and a 'circle discussion'. The first two were introduced in the first seminar as an ongoing practice, whilst the latter two constitute a distinctive exercise, carried out in a particular seminar. In each case we present an evaluation of both successes and risks that these practices pose for furthering inclusion in small-group teaching contexts.

Group Agreements

In our first lesson, we developed group agreements to address inclusion and participation dynamics in the seminar-space. This included a discussion of students being present in class discussions,

[6] This project was conducted in accordance with school guidance on research ethics. Descriptions of the research interests and intended outputs were disseminated to students. Clear channels for reporting and feedback were established so that students could withdraw from the research at any time with no ramifications.

whilst also acknowledging work and care responsibilities, with 'participation' defined as coming to class having completed the readings, with a willingness to bring questions into the room. The likely diversity of our students and their relationships with both each other and the readings were made explicit. The agreements highlighted issues around privilege and bias, the boundaries of 'fact' and 'objectivity', and the importance of using 'I' statements in individual contributions. Here, we emphasised the productive possibilities of discomfort in collaborative learning, drawing on the phrasing of 'generosity' to highlight some ways in which disagreement might be approached within the learning environment (Wazana Tompkins 2016). The group agreements emphasised that 'higher learning is not simply knowledge-based, but relational in focus' (Yannuzzi and Martin 2014, 709), encouraging students to invest in this relationality and the emotions it produces as 'part of pedagogical practice' (*Ibid.*; cf. Barnett 2011; Smele et al. 2017). Our group agreements tried to foreground a feminist pedagogical approach, and encouraged students to actively engage with questions of inclusion and participation in the classroom.

In practice, the success of group agreements proved difficult to measure in terms of producing – rather than just theorising – inclusion. The explicit address towards students' academic, social, and linguistic experiences might have been helpful in drawing focus towards questions of inclusion in the first seminar – and initially, one teacher suggested that some of the more fruitful conversations over the term centred questions of difference, with students expressly bringing their experience in by using 'I' statements. Certainly, we observed that some students did self-regulate their contributions in class, for example noting that they were speaking too much, or giving their turn to someone who had not yet spoken. A couple of students asked their teachers in office hours whether they were dominating seminar discussions, signaling their heightened awareness of seminar dynamics.

Two teachers, however, observed varied application of the principles of speaking and space-sharing outlined in the agreements, dependent on the activity. Within smaller group discussions, students made efforts to share, explain, and take time in expressing their thinking, with some students asking for contributions from quieter students. This was rarely the case in plenary discussions, however, where the same few students tended to lead the discussion each week.

While our hope was that the group agreements would visibilise some of the assumptions embedded in discussions of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and faith in the seminar-space, it

is difficult to speak to the students' ability to *enact* an inclusive learning environment, as opposed to encouraging students to critically reflect on its *possibility, benefits, and limitations* (Barnett 2011). Increased self-reflexivity in students did not necessarily lead to self-policing in actual classroom situations. Indeed, where group agreements prioritise the creation of a safe learning environment 'where *all* know that their ideas and viewpoints will be respected' (https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/building-inclusive-classrooms/establishing-ground-rules, emphasis added), the emphasis on the validity of *everyone's* contributions may, in fact, serve to reinforce existing power imbalances.

Significantly, some of us felt that introducing the agreements at the very beginning of the module potentially fostered a feeling of completeness, a sense that inclusion and participation dynamics *have been dealt with*. One teacher noted that attempts to engage with questions of intersectional inclusion generated observable disengagement, specifically from students who were familiar with group agreements due to their prior engagements with activist spaces. We interpret this apparent disinterest to suggest that the repetition or mainstreaming of group agreements might actually undermine the reflexivity they are intended to foster. Thus, thinking of new ways to generate such discussions in earlier classes may generate genuine engagement with questions of inclusion – preventing group agreements from becoming a 'tick box exercise' (Ahmed 2012). Indeed, when classroom dynamics continue to be problematic *despite* the group agreement, it becomes challenging for teachers to address these dynamics explicitly, partly because the agreement *should have* already dealt with the issue.

Finally, we were left wondering about the assumption implicit in group agreements that students are self-reflexive to the extent that they are able to moderate their behaviour in response to a set of predefined rules. As Boler argues, 'the analysis of utterance in the classroom requires more than rational dialogue' (2004, 8), suggesting that emotions are deeply involved in constructing our viewpoints. Teachers using group agreements may, then, overestimate students' capacity for reflexive decision-making, and not take into account the role of emotions in the formation of opinions, prejudices, or behaviours (Barnett 2011; Smele et al. 2017). While group agreements do provide a useful tool for setting and managing student expectations, they do not, and cannot, address all problematic or disruptive behaviours, nor can they alone correct power differentials or structural inequalities.

Overall, group agreements appear both to meet 'good practice' for teachers attempting to address questions of inclusion and participation, and to complicate understandings of inclusion from a feminist pedagogical perspective. They provided a useful blueprint for an inclusive seminar-space, particularly in terms of coaxing students to critically engage with classroom power dynamics. At the same time, precisely *because* they act as a blueprint for an inclusive classroom – rather than a tool through which to enact it – it is possible that group agreements are limited as to what extent they can conceptually complicate inclusion, suggesting that such complex questions are resolved prior to, rather than generated within, learning environments. Finally, group agreements may underestimate the role of the non-rational in directing behaviour, and correspondingly overestimate students' capacity to modify their behaviour according to a set of predefined principles.

Google Doc Collaborative Resource

Teachers aimed to foster inclusion beyond the seminar-space through a collaborative *Google Doc* that was established as an accessible, flexible, and anonymous space for students to share resources and reflections. Each week, several students were asked to post a question, article, video, or brief reflection related to that week's course material. This, we hoped, would complement material covered in the seminars. At the beginning of each class, or during different activities, students were asked to reflect on the submissions. Importantly, this activity was not assessed, but required independent work from students. Logistically, class teachers managed the resource differently, but all students were expected to devote roughly 30 minutes at different times throughout the term to contributing to the resource. Responding to key UDL principles of providing opportunities for perception, expression, and comprehension (Rose and Meyer 2006), this activity offered an online space for students to approach course material in an informal manner, and to learn from their peers in an anonymised space.

One teacher received positive feedback regarding the collaborative resource from several international students, because it allowed students to share and relate to material beyond the scope of the class. Students related class material to different transnational – particularly their home – contexts, speaking to principles outlined in the group agreements. One teacher also found that students commented less than in other years on the 'irrelevance' of particular topics, perhaps

suggesting that the resource allowed students to relate material to their specific disciplinary interests.

The independence and personal initiative the activity demanded, however, were also a detriment to its success overall. At times, student participation was limited, and we found that students seemed to collectively abandon the document as the semester progressed – despite many suggesting they found it a useful addition to their learning. It is possible that the anonymous and non-assessed aspects of the resource meant that students did not feel pressure to keep up with it (or felt pressure not to, when others were not contributing). In this sense, the *benefits* of the document being an anonymous and spaced-out form of participation also negatively impacted students' commitment to it.

Furthermore, on occasion material was posted that – without adequate explanation – presented uncritical, or problematic views. Without the ability to engage these contributions in dialogue at the moment of their articulation, on these occasions the resource became an ambivalent pedagogical site. At least one teacher, therefore, also felt compelled to 'call out' some contributions in ways that may have undermined the intention of the resource to open up space for independent *student* contribution. This teacher felt that students were not always prepared to approach the materials posted critically, and expressed concern that it risked entrenching a sense of exclusion by mirroring existing power dynamics. Relatedly, another teacher found that students tended to focus on one or two key posts when discussing the week's resources, rather than all submitted material. This meant that equal time was not always allocated to each post – potentially fostering a feeling that not all thoughts or perspectives were equally attended to.

Ultimately, then, while the collaborative resource offered opportunities for promoting inclusion beyond oral participation and for diversifying contextually or linguistically limited curricula, its success was limited by its reliance on independent student work, as well as by its positioning within dynamics of linguistic, contextual, and representational privilege within the seminar-space. While it gave students a space through which they could engage with course material in a flexible manner, it also relied on students being respectful in their engagements. Because the space was anonymised, the resource also resulted in some instances of disrespectful behavior, or compounded classroom power dynamics – paralleling the findings of Beaudoin (2002), Chester and Gwynne (1998), and Dreyfus (2002), and illustrating the advantages and contradictions of using anonymity to enhance inclusion.

Padlet

Eleven weeks into the module, we introduced an exercise using *Padlet*, a web application that allows users to post to a digital canvas. With some important differences, elaborated below, our use of *Padlet* mimicked that of a conventional pin-board and notelets. Students were given the link to a virtual canvas, with a few sentences of guidance that reiterated the teachers' verbal instructions. For the first 15 minutes of the seminar, students were encouraged to use mobile devices (phones, laptops, and tablets) to make contributions, comment on each other's material, and give star-ratings to contributions they found helpful. We chose the 'canvas' format for displaying contributions, allowing content to be grouped, layered, and organised by students, rather than tiled sequentially according to time of upload. The *Padlet* was password protected, and students contributed anonymously.[7]

The objective of the exercise was to draw on readings, lecture material, *Google Doc* material (discussed above), and individual reflections to collaboratively produce a pin-board full of quotations, questions, and interactions. This exercise would, we hoped, provide a space for peer-learning; serve as the first stage of preparation for a debate, which would follow as the main seminar exercise; and finally, generate a resource for ongoing reflection and revision. In contrast to conventional knowledge-mapping exercises, where the teacher usually takes back ownership as they add contributions to a white-board or sum up plenary discussions, this format allowed students to 'maintain ownership of ideas throughout the process' (Laurillard 2009, 7), thus according with feminist pedagogical principles that seek to de-centre power relations (Ellsworth 1989).

The format of the *Padlet* allowed students to work at their own speed and level of involvement, and several teachers reported increased levels of energy amongst the students. This presented a different way of negotiating the familiar dynamic of having to suppress some – more vocal – student contributions in order to make space for more reticent students. Indeed, three of us observed that it was the more reticent students who seemed the most focused on the document. Students were able to make use of dictionaries and translation technology, and even perform quick online searches without feeling like they were 'holding up' faster students. During the activity, students could read large volumes of information, gaining corroboration and/or corrections to their contributions. These features also seemed to encourage participation in subsequent exercises: in

[7] At the time of research, *Padlet* was an open access platform (https://en-gb.padlet.com/).

later small-group discussions, one teacher noticed some of the more reticent students use the *Padlet* as a way of introducing their ideas. Another teacher noted that a student who had never previously voluntarily participated in class discussions made several contributions in the later 'high stakes' context of a debate. In another seminar, however, students barely mentioned the *Padlet* in the following activity, raising doubt about the usefulness of the exercise and the transferability of the knowledge assembled through the activity.

Despite the benefits, there were also several posts that deployed 'the technology as a personal stage for silliness' (Fuchs 2014, 8), using patronising or humorous contributions to potentially undermine the activity. More worryingly, one seminar leader was concerned that the exercise opened the ground for peer 'trolling.' From this perspective, rather than the anonymity of the platform fostering a sense of inclusion, it appeared to decrease the sense of accountability and respect that we demanded in face-to-face discussions, paralleling the limitations observed in the use of the *Google Doc* collaborative resource – with potential implications for distance-learning environments. Indeed, some research has suggested that anonymity in online spaces can facilitate 'disinhibited' behaviour, potentially diminishing the effectiveness of anonymity in creating an inclusive learning environment (Beaudoin 2002; Dreyfus 2002). Chester and Gwynne suggest, similarly, that 'without the usual non-verbal cues and well established etiquette that exist in face-to-face exchanges, users are less likely to feel constrained by convention' (1998, np).

Further, several students voiced active resistance to the activity either out loud, by laughing, or by non-verbal cues such as eye-rolling or pushing their laptops away. In this case, more confident students – whose contributions typically set the tone in seminar discussions – found a new way to inhabit a dominant role. Relatedly, teachers also observed a feeling of frustration from more confident students, particularly over the notelets 'jumping around' and posts being responded to before they had a chance to contribute.

With more time, the *Padlet* exercise could have proven a useful prompt for students to reflect on the experience of a learning activity that is not the best 'fit' to their personal approach to learning, thus helping foster empathy towards learners who experience frustration with other, more commonly used, learning formats. Our experience however, illustrates the extent to which students were accustomed to more conventional methods of in-class participation, and that incorporating intersectional feminist pedagogy into our teaching also relies on students' interest in challenging hegemonic understandings of inclusion. Aligning with our sense that good practice

approaches may not account for multiple forms of classroom exclusion, the *Padlet* may have addressed questions of verbal inclusion and pace, while simultaneously exacerbating the space for peer 'trolling' and non-generosity. As such, the *Padlet* allowed for further reflection on what seems to us an important distinction between measuring and democratising participation (whether non-verbal or written), and facilitating environments that cater to questions of inclusion in relation to power hierarchies.

Circle Discussion

While our 'teaching toolboxes' include various activities that encourage participation from all students, in week eight of the module we used a 'circle discussion' – a variation of Brookfield and Preskill's (1999) 'circle of voices' – as an activity for the entire seminar. Circle discussions involve everyone in the group taking turns to speak in response to set questions, others' contributions, and/or course materials. Importantly, students can only speak when it is their turn, but can respond to multiple points when speaking, and are encouraged to take notes throughout the rounds. Sometimes a time limit is set for individual student contributions – Brookfield and Preskill (*Ibid.*) recommend three minutes. In our version of the circle discussion the teacher was part of the circle, and only responded or participated in the discussion when it was their turn. We started the circle discussion by posing two broad questions and giving students a couple of minutes to reflect, but also gave students the option of responding to the lecture, readings, other students' contributions, and/or other materials. The teacher also provided additional questions at each turn. The circle discussion lasted 50-65 minutes, allowing two or three rounds to be completed during the seminar.

The circle discussion is explicitly intended to democratise participation, give students the chance to practice active listening, and promote continuity (*Ibid.*). We wanted to use the circle discussion specifically to address the (related) issues of uneven participation, inactive listening, and lower participation rates of non-native English speakers in our seminars. Some students whose first language is not English, and who, additionally, had no prior experience of HE in the UK or in English, had expressed to us in office hours that participation in seminar discussions was difficult for them specifically because of the *pace* of the discussion. These students often felt the conversation had moved on by the time they had formulated a response. The circle discussion specifically intervenes in this dynamic by removing 'the stress of having to decide whether or not to try to jump in after another student has finished speaking' (*Ibid.*, 63; cf. Mariskind 2013).

Many students responded positively to the exercise, noting that the discussion format allowed for increased student contributions, as well as a more multi-faceted conversation. In one teacher's case, this seminar had by far the most equal levels of student participation, with students who usually struggled to intervene in open plenary discussions participating much more than usual. In addition to an equalising effect, the circle discussion allowed for multiple conversations to take place simultaneously. Students took to the format well, and frequently began their contributions with statements such as 'I want to respond to what X said…' and 'What you said was interesting and made me think of….'. Some students used their turn to draw connections to previous topics and other modules, as well as to bring in examples from the media, arts, and policy fields. Additionally, some students' contributions performed the function that the teacher would have usually taken on, for example making a connection between another student's contribution and the readings, the lecture, or a topic covered earlier in the module.

However, some students also expressed that while the 'intention' of the circle discussion was well-meaning, the structure was paternalistic, or unfairly stifled more talkative student contributions, suggesting that the activity did not necessarily lead to reflection on class dynamics. Moreover, although the dynamic in the seminars in which we used the circle discussion was more even than usual, this effect did not carry on to seminars that followed. In fact, in the next class the participation dynamics seemed exaggerated in their unevenness: some students dominating discussions and lack of participation from others persisted. As with the group agreement, the circle discussion invited *explicit* reflection from students on questions of power and inclusion/exclusion dynamics in the seminar-space, alongside strategically addressing uneven participation. Yet, similarly to the group agreement, the circle discussion seemed to promote such reflections as *contained* to the specific activity or class – rather than encouraging broader student reflection and practical action in subsequent classes.

Further, the narrow definition of participation itself – as speaking – in the context of the activity may have also resulted in non-verbal modes of participation, such as listening, note-taking, and responding non-verbally being overlooked (Mariskind 2013). Moreover, the democratisation of *contributions* to classroom discussions does not necessarily lead to the democratisation of whose contributions are *heard* (Mayuzumi et al. 2007), and consequently, some students' choice to participate more may increase their sense of alienation, due to not feeling heard.

Finally, equalising participation-as-speaking may benefit some students more than others, depending on the kind of difference they embody and bring into the seminar-space. Harlap argues that 'participants from marginalized groups may choose silence as a strategy to resist voyeurism, the dominant group's desire to have access to all knowledge, including the experiences of the oppressed' (2014, 224-5; cf. Smele et al. 2017). Differences that arise from and manifest deep-seated structural inequalities, such as racial and ethnic, gender, and class differences, may not be as easily 'corrected' with active participation(-as-speaking). Overall, and similarly to the other practices discussed above, our experience with the circle discussion serves to highlight many issues arising from inclusion being defined narrowly – as participation.

Conclusion

In reflecting on our own experience of these 'good practice' approaches to fostering inclusion in the seminar-space, some unanticipated concerns emerged. Activities that responded practically to questions of participation, such as the circle discussion; or created space for differing forms of participation, such as the *Google Doc* and *Padlet*; did not necessarily encourage students to engage in the broader, critical reflection on inclusion that we had hoped. Indeed, these approaches may have even exacerbated problematic dynamics both inside and outside of the seminar-space. Despite these reservations, they appeared successful in giving us the tools to facilitate broader spoken or written participation, and in providing an opportunity to signal our openness to being held accountable for our role as seminar teachers – something we consider central to an intersectional feminist pedagogical approach to inclusive teaching. This was reflected in student evaluations of the seminars, where our investment in fostering an inclusive teaching environment was favourably remarked upon.

The group agreements, as well as the invited student reflection on the dynamics of the circle discussion, drew more directly on a critical intersectional feminist pedagogy that incorporates a reflexive critique of power. Yet, these facilitations did not necessarily allow us to *enact* such criticality or reflexivity in the seminar-space, and may have even suggested that such dynamics could be 'resolved' in ways that are contradictory to our own understanding of the ongoing processes of exclusion/inclusion. While our explicit focus on inclusion in the seminar-space opened the door to some changes in dynamics, as well as to productive reflection from students, the exercises simultaneously confirmed that 'all speech is not free' (Boler 2004) in that

speech alone cannot overcome structural inequalities in the seminar-space. In other words, the exercises and approaches discussed above functioned to *highlight*, rather than proactively *tackle,* power differences and inequalities evident in the seminar-space.

By evaluating these practices, we struggled to find indices of inclusion that functioned beyond the limited parameters of participation. Thus, whilst our pedagogical framework insists that we maintain a critical approach to verbal and written participation as *necessarily* enacting inclusion, we felt unable to adequately ascertain teaching practices or activities that may engage, or allow room for, practices like refusal, silent listening, or reflexive critique. We felt beholden to measurements such as oral participation or written contribution as giving us a sense of student feelings of inclusion – potentially confirming, rather than working to unpack, neoliberal 'tick box' approaches. Further, the draw we felt towards viewing inclusion *as* participation failed to address questions of alienation, obligation, and hierarchy that such strategies might generate or confirm, rather than work to dismantle.

While teaching methods and activities that encourage participation certainly have their place in fostering inclusion, they should not be considered an exhaustive strategy for achieving inclusive classrooms, nor should they be seen as necessarily dealing equally well with all kinds of difference. In the increasingly individualised neoliberal UK HE context, commitments to complicating 'tickbox' approaches to inclusion remain ever relevant. An intersectional feminist pedagogy should be suspicious of framings of inclusion that aim to see all students meet a predefined framework for participation, or what Burke calls 'a model of inclusion that insists on fitting and/or conforming to the hegemonic and normative frames' (2017, 441). In particular, we suggest that the adoption of inclusion at institutional and national levels must not result in localised, context-sensitive practices being displaced by the uncritical application of centrally-mandated 'good practice'.

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